

of these cases, smoldered until the alarm was given, filling the building with smoke and directly the doors were opened by the firemen the flames rushed up to the top of the building, through the shaft, and caused the explosion of congested smoke and vapor.

"The firm had always been particularly careful in precautions against fire, and had complied with every requirement made by the insurance companies. There were no goods carried by the assured, which would be susceptible to spontaneous combustion, and in the absence of any positive information to the contrary the committee assumes that the fire may have originated in the manner above stated."

The Baltimore conflagration is likely to afford an illustration of Thomson's line:

"From seeming evil still educing good;"

for the phenomena and the obvious lessons of the fire are being most carefully studied in order to learn by what measures the recurrence of such a calamity may be prevented.

CANADIAN FIRE UNDERWRITERS ASSOCIATION.

The following Montreal members of the above Association are attending the usual quarterly meeting, which convened on the 29th ult., at Toronto; Messrs. M. C. Hinshaw, Vice-President, T. L. Morrissey, James McGregor, W. MacKay, Walter Kavanagh, J. G. Thompson, Lansing Lewis, W. B. Colley, Harold Hampson, H. M. Lambert, and P. M. Wickham.

The business under discussion included the appointment of an inspector for mercantile schedule rating.

PROMINENT TOPICS.

The report of the Wreck Commissioner of the Marine and Fisheries Department, just issued, is not a satisfactory document. The casualties to vessels navigating the St. Lawrence are reported to have been so heavy, that "they will tend to maintain the high rates of insurance on Gulf and St. Lawrence shipping." At the same time it is both exasperating and gratifying to find the judgment of the Wreck Commissioner as follows:—

"The prevalence of fog in the Gulf and River St. Lawrence, and the variability of the currents, both as regards strength and direction, account for nearly every casualty, but I am of the opinion that these conditions can be easily overcome by ordinary care and the usual precautions adopted by practical seamen and pilots.

"Of the ten casualties investigated, the masters were responsible for four, pilots for three, and three may be classified as due to the perils of navigation."

It is indeed vexatious to find that seven out of ten casualties were avoidable by "ordinary care," and it is encouraging to hear from such an authority that only three out of ten accidents were due to "the perils of navigation." If seven tenths of the casualties connected with the St. Lawrence were eliminated by ordinary care, the reputation of the river

would be cleared from undeserved reproaches. It is clearly not the St. Lawrence, but its navigators who are mainly responsible for high insurance rates.

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The total value of the trade via the St. Lawrence for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1903, was \$132,019,550. In 1902 it was \$113,414,381; in 1901, \$111,500,341, and in 1900, \$97,948,377; with the trade increasing so enormously, a greater number of casualties is only to be expected.

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With the object of facilitating the holding of investigations the "Shipping Casualties Act" was amended in October. The most important changes being as follows:—

(1) The minister may appoint a commissioner to hold formal investigations, in place of the necessity for a separate commission being issued for each casualty as required before.

(2) A "Statement of the Case" need not be issued—as heretofore—before the commencement of the proceedings where a certificate is to be dealt with, the defendant's certificate may be cancelled or suspended after he has been furnished with a copy of the report or statement of the case and had an opportunity of making a defence.

(3) An investigation may be held into the stranding of any vessel, whether damaged or not.

The Honourable the Minister of Marine and Fisheries has appointed Captains Archibald Reid and John Temple to be assessors for a term of three years, at the ports of Montreal and Quebec respectively, and—in pursuance of Section 8 of the amended "Shipping Casualties Act"—he has appointed Captain Salmon, Wreck Commissioner, a commissioner to hold investigations into shipping casualties.

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The £4,000,000 (\$19,466,666) Dominion of Canada 4 per cent. loan of 1874 falls due on 1st May next. Towards this sum £760,000 has been provided for by the sinking fund. The Government, through the Bank of Montreal, have offered holders, to the extent of £2,500,000, the option of renewing their bonds for three years at 4 per cent. per annum, the principal of such renewed bonds being due May 1, 1907. Holders who renew under this offer will have the option at any time up to April 30, 1906, of converting each £100 of their stock or bonds (with all unmatured coupons attached) into £105 of the Dominion 3 per cent. inscribed stock, due July 1, 1938. The option of renewing it is to be open until March 31, unless bonds and stock to the aggregate amount of £500,000 have been previously deposited.

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A verdict was rendered in the Court of King's Bench in this city, on 26th March, after the case had been before the Courts for two years: The defendant was Mr. Mason, proprietor of a local trade paper chiefly devoted to grain and produce affairs.